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VIET-NAM Free-World Challenge in Southeast Asia

by

GEORGE W. BALL

Under Secretary of State

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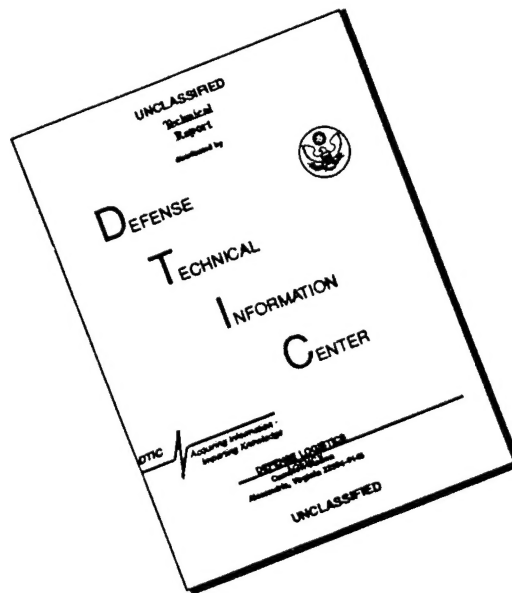
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**This article is based on an address made
by Under Secretary Ball before the Eco-
nomic Club of Detroit at Detroit, Michigan,
on April 30, 1962.**

VIET-NAM

Free-World Challenge in Southeast Asia

[Viet-Nam is one of the world's danger spots where a valiant people are struggling to defend their freedom.] We Americans are assisting them in this struggle.

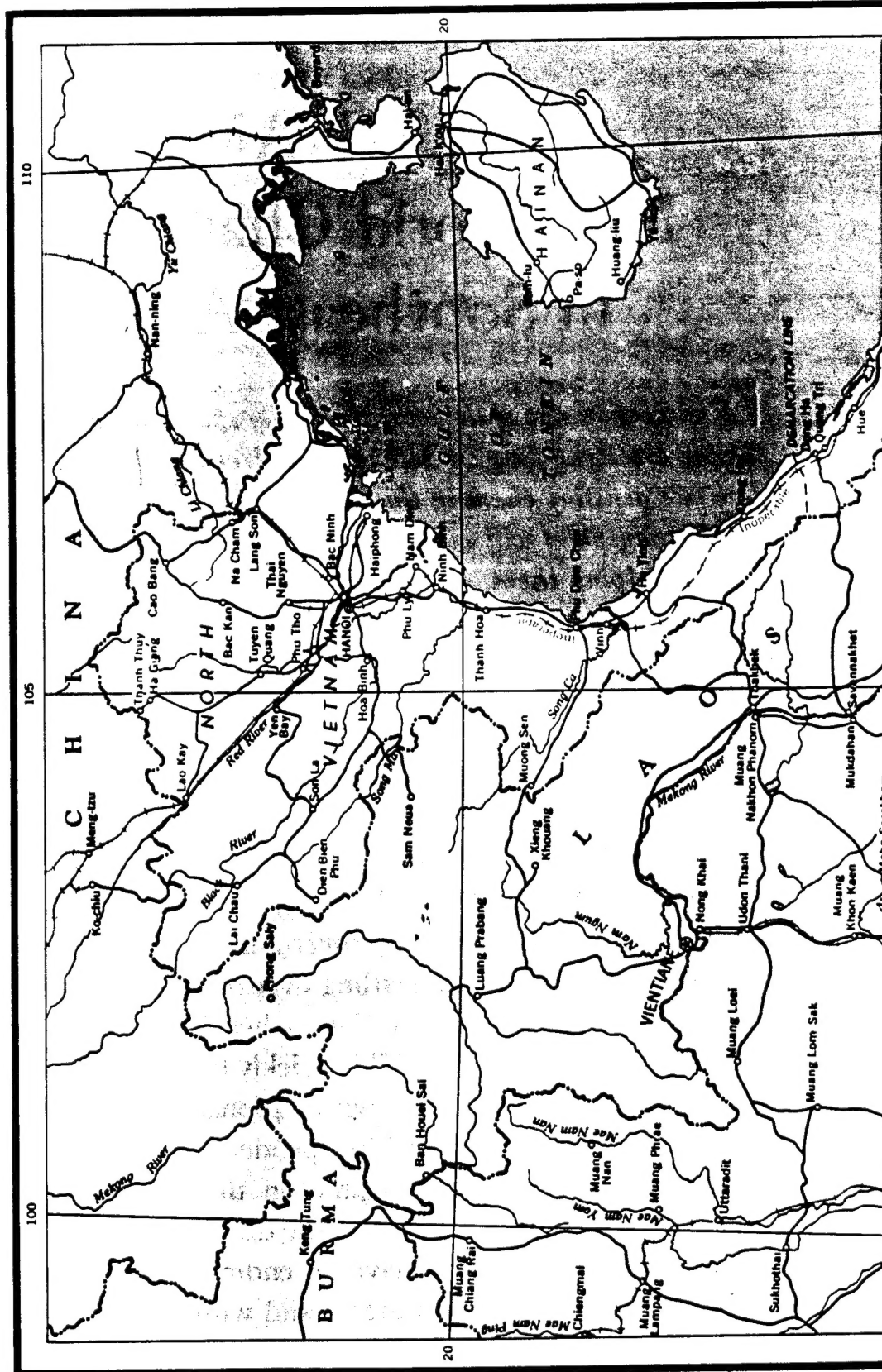
[This pamphlet will explain why we are helping them, how we are helping them, and what are the prospects for peace and stability.]

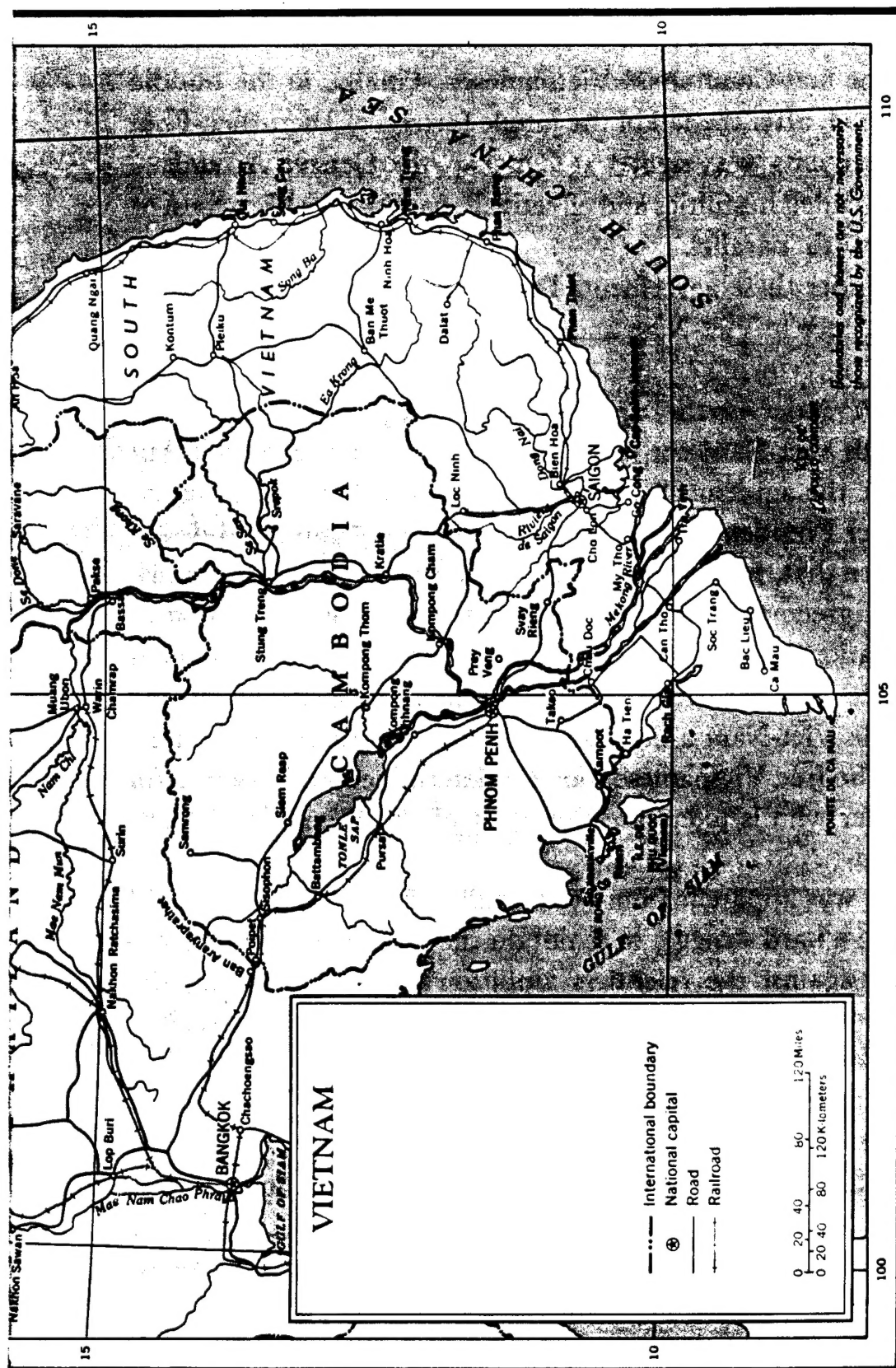
Historical Background

What is Viet-Nam? It is a narrow strip of high hills, swamps, and riceland that runs along the South China Sea. Together with Cambodia and Laos, it formed the area of the French Empire called Indochina.

During the Second World War the Japanese took over its administration from the Vichy government. Then in 1946—at a time when peace was settling over most of the world—war began in earnest in Viet-Nam, when France attempted to reestablish its authority. This quickly turned into a struggle between France together with nationalist elements that looked to France for eventual independence on one side, and a Vietnamese Communist regime on the other—a mean, jungle conflict known in Paris as “the dirty war.”

Moreover, it seemed to have no ending. With material assistance from the United States and with massive French





military support, the struggle went on for 8 long and tragic years. Over this period, France granted increasing autonomy to the non-Communist Vietnamese. Finally, in the middle of 1954, after the fall of the jungle fortress of Dien-Bien-Phu, agreements were signed at Geneva—the Geneva Accords—that ended hostilities and effectively partitioned Viet-Nam at the 17th parallel.

Under these agreements France accorded complete independence to Viet-Nam and subsequently withdrew its forces. The agreements created an International Control Commission to supervise the carrying out of their provisions. Neither South Viet-Nam nor the United States was a signatory, but after the agreements were concluded the U.S. Government under President Eisenhower made clear by unilateral declaration that, while it would refrain from using force to disturb the agreements, it would view any renewal of aggression in violation of the agreements as a serious threat to international peace and security. The Geneva agreements effectively made Viet-Nam a divided land—like Korea and Germany.

The free Vietnamese found a determined and resourceful leader who is today the President of the Republic of Viet-Nam—Ngo Dinh Diem.

It was apparent from the first that President Diem would have a hard struggle to maintain the security of the new nation against the relentless ambition of Ho Chi-Minh, the leader of the Communist regime in North Viet-Nam (called the Viet Minh), to extend Communist domination. The free Vietnamese needed help and we provided it. The United States undertook to assist in training Diem's army. Through the SEATO (Southeast Asia Treaty Organization) treaty, which came into force early in 1955, the United States joined with others in throwing a protective arm around the embattled new nation.

Free Viet-Nam faced problems of monumental dimensions. When it achieved independence its economy was a shambles. Years of occupation and bitter fighting had left their harsh mark on a troubled land. Canals and irrigation systems were damaged and neglected. Thousands of farmers had killed off their stock and sought refuge in the cities. The transportation system had broken down. And all this was enormously complicated by the departure of the French technicians and specialists who for so long had operated the economy, leaving behind a staggering shortage of managerial and technical skills.

Moreover, by creating a symbol of liberty and independence, the new state compounded its own problems. It became a magnet for those wishing to be free. Almost a million North Vietnamese fled south across the 17th parallel to escape from a Communist system they found intolerable.

With such staggering problems optimism seemed foolhardy. Few observers thought the new republic could survive over the long pull. The estimates of its life expectancy ranged from 6 months to a year.

But these calculations omitted one enormous concealed resource—the intelligence, the native skill, and the pride of the Vietnamese. These qualities alone could not, of course, keep the young republic afloat without some outside help. The United States poured in large amounts of capital and technical assistance. Other nations assisted. Yet all the outside assistance in the world would not have altered the balance without that saving element—the fierce will of the Vietnamese people to survive in freedom.

South Viet-Nam's Achievements

Not only did they survive; they built their country under appalling difficulties and they achieved striking social prog-

ress. They effectively integrated the vast flood of refugees into their society. Under an agrarian reform plan, 300,000 tenant farmers were offered the chance to buy their own land for a modest price. Thousands of new schools were built. In 4 years, from 1956 to 1960, the elementary school population increased from 400,000 to 1,500,000.

Most significantly, while in the free South the standard of living was moving upward, in the Communist North it was dismally falling. During those 4 years per capita food production rose in the South by 20 percent but fell in the North by 10 percent. Textile output in the South jumped more than 20 percent in 1958 alone. Sugar production during that year more than doubled. And today, although the bulk of the industrial plant is located in North Viet-Nam and the population of the North is 2 million greater than the South, the gross national product of South Viet-Nam is higher than its Communist neighbor.

This would have been impressive progress even for a peaceful land, but South Viet-Nam was not permitted to live in peace. Its progress was too conspicuous—so conspicuous as to be intolerable to Ho Chi-Minh and his Communist henchmen in Hanoi.

Just as the masters of the Kremlin could neither overlook nor forgive the brilliant economic progress of West Berlin, so the Communist leaders in Hanoi could not ignore this vivid demonstration of their own failure in Southeast Asia. In one instance, the Communists built a wall. In the other they began a steady calculated effort of terror, infiltration, murder, and conquest. We shall not attempt here to describe the intricate operations of the Viet Cong organization, which has its headquarters in Hanoi, the capital of North Viet-Nam. There has been much information in the press recently as to the systematic way in which men and materials

have been introduced into the South along the sea and land infiltration routes. This has all been fully reported. It is not rumor or speculation but documented fact.

Campaign of Subversion and Insurgency

Let us at this point dispel a few myths.

The struggle in South Viet-Nam today is not a local civil war. It is a carefully planned and mounted campaign of subversion and insurgency—equipped and directed from Hanoi.

Consider, for example, what the Viet Cong is seeking to destroy. Its targets are the very symbols of economic progress—schools, hospitals, first aid stations, malaria eradication teams, and the transport system.

Tactics such as these are directed to the ends of a Communist takeover; they do not serve the people.

There is no doubt as to what we are observing in Viet-Nam. It is another attempt by the Communists to extend their control by fomenting disorder and revolt against established governments. We have seen this same pattern before—in Greece, Malaya, and the Philippines. As it was defeated there, so, with our support, the free Vietnamese will defeat it in South Viet-Nam.

The Communists in Viet-Nam have fitted their tactics to the conditions of the struggle. Given the present stage of weaponry and the difficulties of supply through the narrow bottleneck of Hanoi, they have avoided the kind of naked aggression that marked the war in Korea. Instead they have employed the tactics of guerrilla warfare, the techniques of terror and propaganda, in an effort to achieve the same end—the conquest of territory and people.

Since 1958 the Viet Cong terror campaign has increased sharply. Officials have been assassinated, teachers killed in

their schoolrooms; anything and anyone that represented stability or order has served as a likely target. The control apparatus in the north has been vastly expanded. Political cadres and military replacements have been sent south in increasing numbers. Infiltration systems—by sea and by land—have been expanded. Local recruitment has become a priority assignment for all Communist units. Given the size of the country and the resources available, the Communist effort, directed from Hanoi, to penetrate, subvert, and conquer South Viet-Nam is one of the most extensive of its kind in history.

The United States and Viet-Nam

But one can say: What does this mean to us? Granted the valiance of the Vietnamese people, the high quality of their fighting spirit, how does a guerrilla war 10,000 miles away in the fetid jungles of Southeast Asia concern America? How is it relevant to the larger interests of our policy? Is it worth the millions of dollars we have poured into Viet-Nam or the risk of American lives?

The answer to all of those questions must be affirmative. We have consistently given that answer for a number of years.

In 1955, with the overwhelming approval of the Senate, the United States joined its partners in the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization. Although, because of the provisions of the Geneva Accords, South Viet-Nam could not be a signatory to that treaty, the protective umbrella of the treaty was extended to cover Viet-Nam by means of a protocol agreed to by all the signatories.

President Eisenhower defined our obligation well when he stated in a message to the Vietnamese Government in 1960:

“Although the main responsibility for guarding independence will always, as it has in the past, belong to the Vietna-

mese people and their government, I want to assure you that for so long as our strength can be useful, the United States will continue to assist Viet-Nam in the difficult yet hopeful struggle ahead."

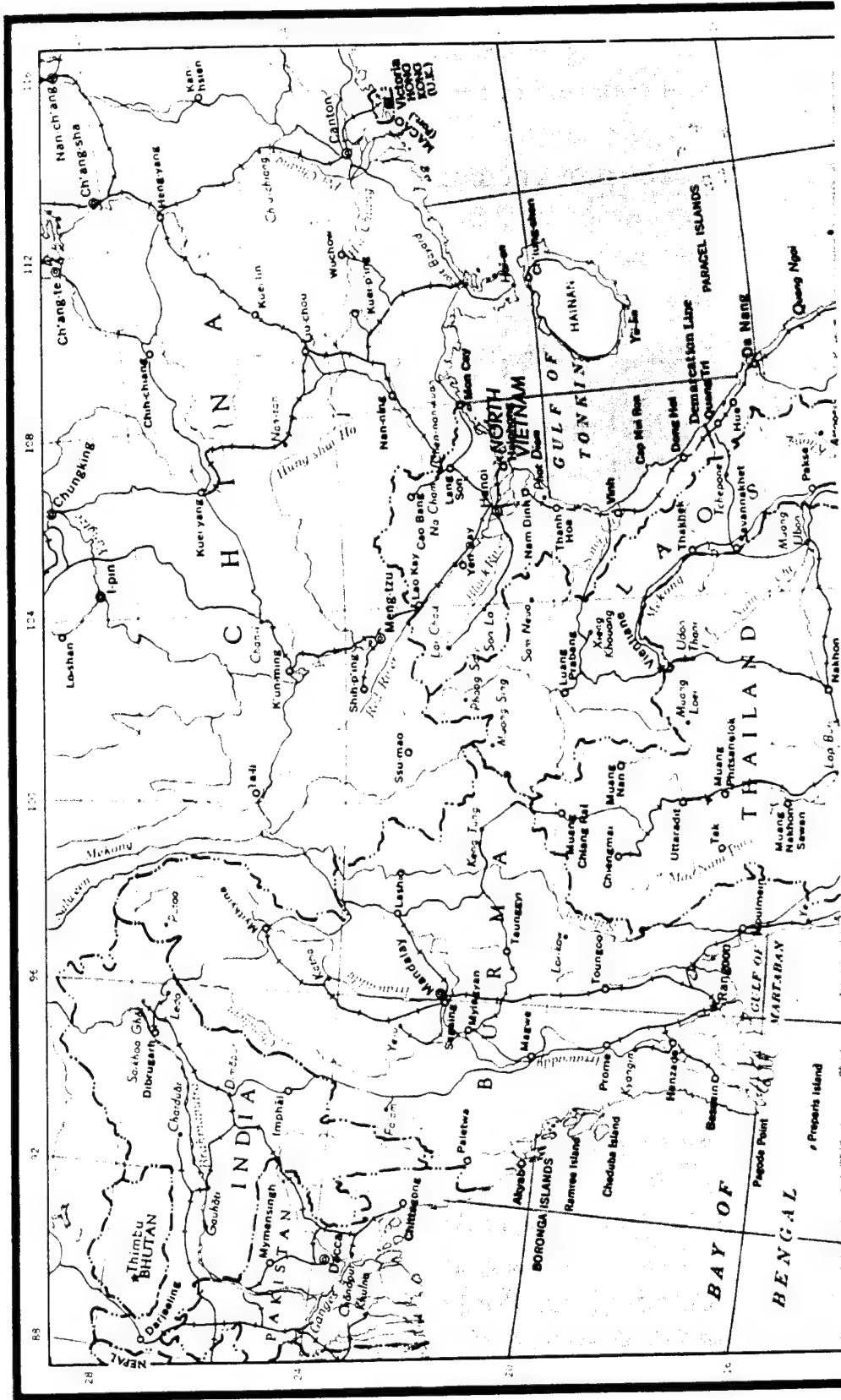
The protocol to the SEATO treaty is an expression of the signatories' vital interests in the preservation of the integrity and independence of Viet-Nam. Those interests derive both from geography and from the very nature of the power struggle now going on in the world between aggressive Communist power and freedom.

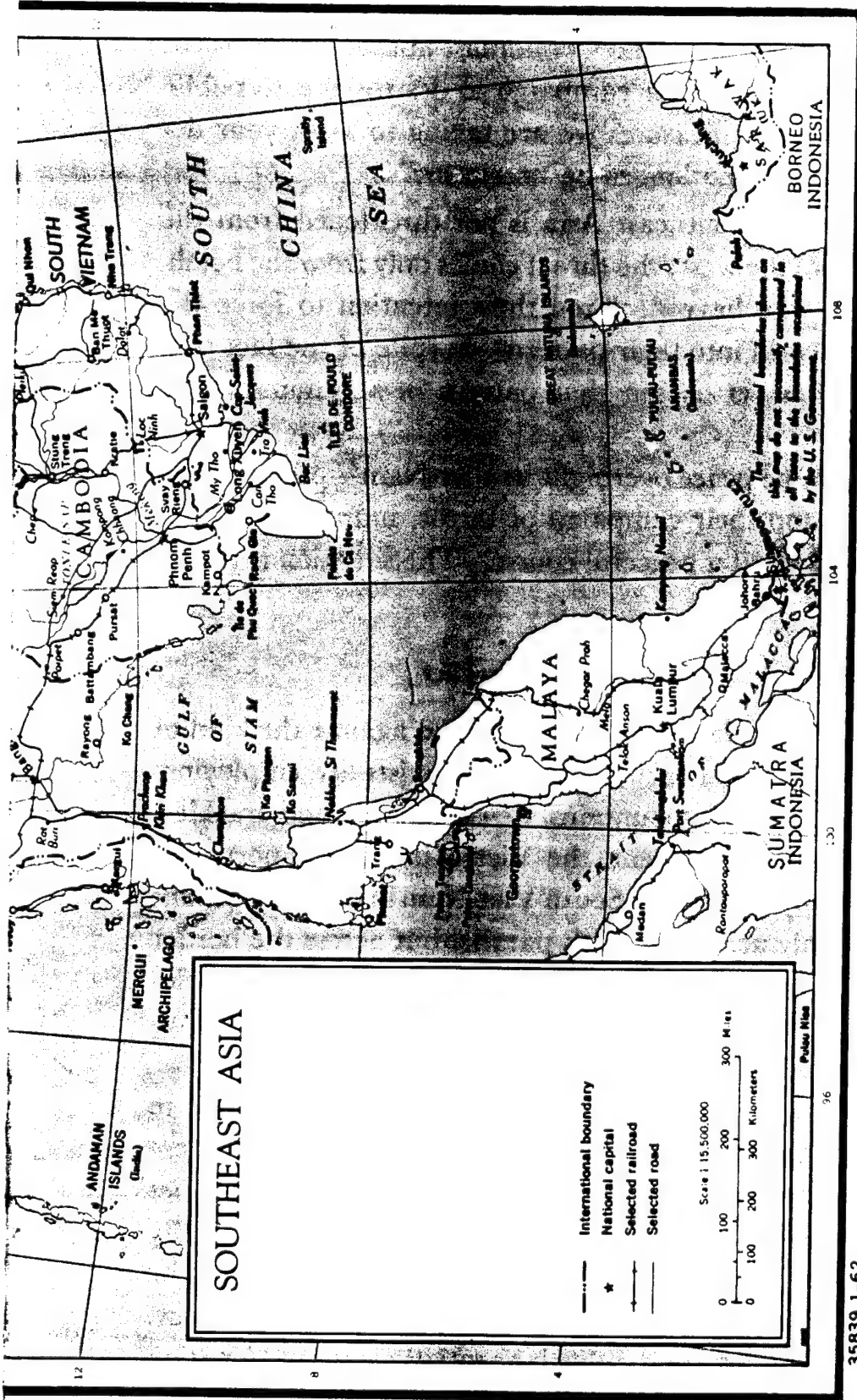
One does not have to accept fully the automatic operation of the so-called "domino" theory to recognize the strategic significance of South Viet-Nam. It forms one shore of the South China Sea, which is the gateway to Malaya and Indonesia. It controls the mouth of the Mekong River, which is the coronary artery of Southeast Asia. If the Vietnamese people were to lose the struggle to maintain a free and independent nation, it would be a loss of tragic significance to free-world interests in the whole of Asia and the South Pacific.

And more than that, if the United States were to neglect its responsibilities to the Vietnamese people, the consequences would not be limited even to those areas; they would be worldwide. For the free-world's security cannot be given away piecemeal; it is not divisible. When the going gets rough we cannot observe those responsibilities that are easy or near at hand and disregard the others.

What we do or fail to do in Viet-Nam will be felt both by our antagonists and our friends. How we act in Viet-Nam will have its impact on Communist actions in Europe, in Africa, and in Latin America.

Last December, in responding to President Diem's request for assistance, President Kennedy reaffirmed the American position clearly:





conference in Geneva, we worked out the basis for an agreement (to which the Soviet Union and Red China were among the parties). This agreement would provide for the withdrawal of the Viet Minh forces from Laos. It would provide further that the routes of access to South Viet-Nam should be kept under observation by an international commission in which the Canadian and Indian members would have much greater freedom of action than has been the case with the control commission in South Viet-Nam. In addition, the Soviet Union would undertake as cochairman to assure the compliance of the Communist parties to the agreement.

This agreement is to take effect when the Lao people complete the establishment of a government of national union that will unite the present three warring elements.

U.S. Role in Viet-Nam

The closing of the Laos border to infiltration can reduce the buildup of organized subversion and terror in South Viet-Nam. But under the best of circumstances the creation of a secure Vietnamese state will be a long, slow process. It will require not only the building of indigenous political support but the achievement of a rate of economic progress that alone can assure political stability—political stability that can in turn provide the base on which to build the military strength needed to create the climate of confidence and security in which economic and social progress are possible.

Inevitably the main burden of meeting and beating the Viet Cong threat must fall on the people of South Viet-Nam, on their Government, and on their armed forces. It is their country, their lives, their future that are most directly in danger.

But we can provide, we are providing, and we must continue to provide the means to help the Vietnamese help them-

selves. We are increasing our effort in training, in logistics, in the transport of the Viet-Nam forces.

Let there be no misunderstanding as to the shape and dimensions of the role we are playing. The United States has *no* combat units in Viet-Nam. We are *not* fighting the war, as some reports have suggested. We are *not* running the war, as the Communists have tried assiduously to argue.

What we are doing is to provide material and training personnel—all at the request of the Vietnamese Government. We are helping them in their struggle. Even this limited effort cannot be accomplished without some danger. A part of our men are necessarily exposed to combat situations as they work with their Vietnamese comrades. Over the past 7 years there have been 19 Americans killed or wounded by the Viet Cong, 4 of them civilians. At the present rate the South Vietnamese are suffering that number of casualties every 12 hours.

Much of the ground training is being undertaken by members of the United States Special Forces, who have been trained at Fort Bragg, N.C. Every man in the Special Forces is a double volunteer. First, he volunteered as a paratrooper; only after qualifying as a paratrooper was he permitted to apply for Special Forces training. In the course of his training he learned judo, archery, knife fighting, mountain climbing, skiing, and snowshoeing, as well as the techniques for survival under jungle conditions. In addition he may have qualified as an expert in field medicine, demolition, communications, or weaponry. He studied native languages and customs.

The Special Forces graduate is physically tough. But more important than his physical stamina is his leadership ability—and, broadly speaking, his political understanding. For he is first and foremost a teacher, and in a hard school.

Counterinsurgency by South Viet-Nam

Can the Vietnamese win their battle against the Communists even with our help? Here again the answer is definitely yes. Systematic insurgency is not unbeatable if the proper methods are used to beat it.

The guerrillas whom the Vietnamese Army is fighting are under distinct handicaps. In many cases they are poorly trained and equipped and not motivated by deep conviction. Rather, they are merely unsophisticated villagers or peasants who have been conscripted by terror or treachery. In such a case they are likely to have had only rudimentary training in weapons handling and tactics. Their equipment may be makeshift, often just what they can capture or fabricate themselves.

Only the leaders and the hard core have a strong ideological commitment. The rank and file are their puppets—those whom they have bought, coerced, or intimidated.

The Viet Cong guerrillas are seeking, by a variety of means, to achieve psychological dominance over the Government forces. They are relying heavily on propaganda and psychological warfare techniques. But such techniques are vulnerable; they depend to a large extent on maintaining the *mystique* of success. They can, therefore, be undercut by a serious defeat or a succession of defeats that will destroy the aura of invincibility on which their effectiveness depends.

To counter the guerrilla attack, the guerrillas must be deprived of their source of support, which means that they must be denied access to the villages. In Viet-Nam the guerrillas do not have the support of the people. Yet so long as they have *access* to the people, they can undermine confidence, disrupt local government, and compel submission by terror and threat.

To deny this access the villages must be provided with security and protection. Strong ties must be developed between local communities and the central Government. The village people must be helped to acquire a sense of identity with the national state.

And at the same time the *mystique* of success must be dispelled. Military units must be trained and deployed to destroy or capture the insurgent forces. Effective action depends on the development of sound, dependable intelligence—quick knowledge of guerrilla movements and sufficient mobility to permit force to be brought to bear rapidly to repel guerrilla attacks.

Within the past few weeks the Vietnamese Government has embarked on a course of action patterned in part on the successful British antiguerrilla campaign in Malaya during the 1950's. This plan calls for subdividing areas of heavy guerrilla penetration into small districts. Key villages within these districts are then encircled with a protection of barbed wire and watchtowers. Entry is carefully scrutinized. Everyone over 12 years of age must have a special pass. Curfews are ordered by the civil authorities. Controls are being placed on food, clothing, and other supplies to make sure that none are diverted to the guerrillas.

To the greatest extent possible the villagers are being armed and trained and the villages provided with radios that will enable them to request aid when an attack occurs.

In the occasional situations where necessary—but only where necessary—scattered villages and areas heavily infested by marauding bands will be abandoned and their occupants moved into defended villages that will afford them protection.

As these actions are taken, the guerrillas are beginning to find themselves uncomfortably conspicuous. Without identi-

fication they find it difficult to intermingle. After the curfew they find it difficult to move.

The progressive insulation of the villages will deny the guerrillas their chief source of food and supply. As their supplies diminish, the guerrillas will be forced to take greater risks, even to attack the fortified villages. And when attacked, the villagers will not only be prepared to defend themselves but will be able, by radio, to call for immediate help. The helicopters we are supplying will make it possible for Government forces to respond immediately.

Through fear of reprisal the villagers, in the past, have provided intelligence to the guerrillas but little to the Government. With the elimination of that fear they should serve as equally diligent sources of information on guerrilla movements. Meanwhile, recruitment of new guerrillas within the villages should drop off sharply.

As each area is pacified and brought under effective protection the program will be extended to other areas of heavy infiltration. Finally, the entire nation should be once again under total Government control.

Creating a Basis for Progress

Yet all these aspects of a counterinsurgency campaign can only create the conditions in which social and economic progress is possible. Without that progress there can be no permanent success, for an unstable society is a fertile soil for insurgency.

The response to the Communist threat in Viet-Nam cannot, therefore, be limited to military measures, no matter how well conceived and conducted. The Government in Saigon is aware that, in the long run, victory will be won or lost in the villages and cities and in the minds and hearts of men.

While carrying on the struggle against externally supported forces, the Vietnamese authorities are tackling, as rapidly as

conditions permit, the tasks all new nations face. With assistance from the United States and other friendly countries they are rebuilding road systems, training teachers, and erecting schools.

South Viet-Nam is potentially a rich agricultural area. Before enemy action increased in recent months, rice production had been stepped up so that exports were again possible. Research and experimentation in diversification of agriculture has had a high priority. New fiber crops are now grown in the highlands. Rural credit facilities have been established to aid small farmers.

United States loans and Vietnamese Government funds are being used to reequip the railroads, modernize the Saigon water system, and increase the power resources. French aid is helping to reestablish coal production and build a cement plant. German assistance has developed a technical training school. The Japanese are building a power dam.

Small industries are taking hold. In spite of the insecurity of the area, Vietnamese and foreign investors are taking the first steps toward creating industrial strength. The beginnings are there—a papermill, a glassworks, pharmaceutical plants, textile mills. American and British oil companies have just signed an agreement to build a refinery. The native ability of the Vietnamese people has been proven. Granted the possibility of peace, their destiny is assured.

Recognizing the Nature of the Conflict /

The task that we have set for ourselves in Viet-Nam can thus be simply stated. It is to help a courageous people maintain and defend their independence in a strategic area where the free-world's interests are deeply committed. This is a task that we must stay with until the Viet Minh stop their aggression. This task may not be concluded quickly. It took

8 years in Malaya. Since then much has been learned—but it will still take time.

The struggle in Viet-Nam requires the slow, relentless execution of a tried and proven plan of counterinsurgency. This is not a type of struggle congenial to the American temperament. We prefer dramatic victories, frontal attacks, the organization and mobilization of massive force and its effective employment.

What we can expect in Viet-Nam by contrast is the long, slow, arduous carrying out of a process. Results will not be apparent overnight, for the operation is, of necessity, the patient winning back of a land to freedom, village by village.

Yet it is important that we recognize the nature of the conflict underway in that remote corner of the globe, that we study it and that we comprehend its meaning, for the struggle in Viet-Nam represents a type of threat that we would be well advised not to underestimate.

Insurgency of this sort we have seen before in recent years. We are likely to see it again and again as the Communists seek, through the methods of stealth and terror, to disrupt the newer nations that are struggling toward the establishment of an independent national life and to frustrate the hopes of their peoples for peace and freedom.

It will take effort to defeat this insurgency in Viet-Nam. Most of all it will take the patient application of effort over a long period of time. But the Vietnamese people are sturdy and resilient and they have the will to win—and when they do win, the world can count one more victory on the side of freedom and justice and the hope for stable peace.

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